

BOOK REVIEWS

Amos Eaton

Amos Eaton, scientist and educator, 1776-1842. By Ethel M. McAllister. 587 pages. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941. \$5.00.

One by one the early American workers in the botanical field are receiving adequate attention at the hands of enthusiastic and competent biographers. It is nearly a century since Darlington devoted volumes to Baldwin and to the Bartrams and Marshalls; these consisted largely of letters written by and to those worthies, but contained biographical data to which little could be added today. In 1895, the late R. E. Call published a carefully digested record of the work of Rafinesque, which has stood the test of time. Several years ago Andrew D. Rodgers, 3rd, of Columbus, Ohio, became interested in botanical biography, and the first volume of what it is to be hoped may be an extended series from his pen was issued last year. This dealt with the life of Sullivant, and a parallel exhaustive treatment of Torrey's life is expected shortly. Similar in its evidence of thorough research, although not limited to a single subject, is S. W. Geiser's "Naturalists of the Frontier."

And now there lies before us a volume of nearly 600 pages devoted to Amos Eaton. Eaton's was a very forceful character, making a very strong impression upon every one whose life touched his. He was a versatile genius; first a practicing lawyer and land-agent, later a traveling lecturer on botany, mineralogy, geology, zoology, and chemistry, and finally the founder and head of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, an educational establishment unique in its scope and methods. Throughout his earlier life he was beset by misfortunes that might have crushed a less buoyant spirit, but toward the end he was able to enjoy in comparative peace the fruits of his long and honorable career. An inscription on a bronze tablet in Amos Eaton Hall, at Rensselaer, sums up his life in these words: "Pioneer, as student, teacher, and author, in agriculture, botany, chemistry, and zoology. Promoter of field work and laboratory practice. Father of American geology. One of the great figures in the history of science in the United States. He directed the destinies of Rensselaer School from its inception until the year of his death."

Because of his versatility, Eaton is remembered by different persons for various reasons. To the botanists of this country, however,

he was a great figure in American botany, because of the stimulus he gave to the study of our science. Other botanists there had been and were, but only one of these, Benjamin Smith Barton, was particularly noted as a teacher; the circle of his influence was not large, and he died at a comparatively early age. Cultured people flocked to Eaton's lectures and were inspired by them, and he was the author of the first popular manual for the identification of our native plants. He was by no means as profound a botanical student as some of his contemporaries, but he was a good botanist, and devoted particular attention to the widest possible diffusion of such knowledge as he possessed. This constitutes his claim to remembrance by posterity.

The volume before us gives evidence of extensive and painstaking research, and the results are presented clearly and pleasantly. Perhaps the most confusing part of the book is in the few pages devoted to Eaton's "family life." The treatment here is full and accurate, but it is necessary to read and reread it before one can feel at all sure just how many wives and children Eaton really had; the number of each was unusually large.

A 55-page bibliography of the sources, both manuscript and printed, consulted in the preparation of the work, precedes the index. This is remarkable, not only for the large number of entries (more than 900), but for the exasperating incompleteness of detail in the case of many of them. The 666 letters are listed in detail, with names of writers and addressees, dates, and present location.

JOHN HENDLEY BARNHART

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

A Bacteriology Laboratory Guide

Laboratory Guide in Elementary Bacteriology. By M. S. Marshall. The Blakiston Company, Philadelphia. 1941. Pp. 244. \$1.75.

This is an unusual manual for beginning students in the study of bacteria. The subject matter is presented in such a way that analysis, thought and interpretation take precedence over the routine performance of the experiment. The material is presented from the standpoint that few students will pursue the subject further.

The manual is divided into six sections which include: Introductory Technique, Morphology, Physiology, Applied Bacteriology,